DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 138 500 SO 009 935

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TITLE Anarchism & Educational Policy Studies; A Marxist View of Joel Spring's "The Sorting Machine."
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, New York, April 3-8, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Analytical Criticism; Bias; Book Reviews; *Educational History; *Educational Philosophy; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Government Role; Higher Education; Historiography; *Literary Criticism; Philosophy; *Policy Formation; *Political Attitudes; Power Structure; Public Education; School Industry Relationship; Social Sciences; Social Stratification
IDENTIFIERS Sorting Machine; Spring (Joel H)

ABSTRACT

A critical analysis and interpretation of "The Sorting Machine" by Joel H. Spring is presented. The book, which uses a historical revisionist approach to trace the development and impact of the corporate-government-foundation network on the ideological orientation of the American educational system, makes its greatest contribution by re-examing research into the educational power structure. Spring analyzes the class bias of educational opinion leaders, documents the marketing of math and science curricula, and forecasts the extension of labor power into the social sciences and humanities. Writing from the ideological viewpoint of anarchism, Spring maintains that the contradiction between the individual and the state is of primary importance and has been neglected by the educational system. The book gives evidence of greater theoretical depth than many works of the historical revisionists but it has shortcomings, including subjective idealism, use of contradictory and unreliable evidence, methodological weakness, omission of crucial issues such as McCarthyism, and oversimplification of problem areas such as curriculum development and the need for educational planning. The conclusion is that Spring's book offers insights for policy makers, educational reformers, and revolutionaries and should be read as a sophisticated attempt to apply a revisionist superstructure to educational policy research. (Author/DB)

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Anarchism & Educational Policy Studies; A Marxist View of Joel Spring's The Sorting Machine

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In analyzing the developments of the post war epoch, The Sorting Machine briefly consummates the unlikely alliance of Dwight D. Eisenhower and Joel H. Spring, spokesman for the anarchist faction of "the new historical revisionists."[1] Spring extends Eisenhower's admonitions concerning the "military industrial complex" to include the development of an education-industrial complex. The ideological breadth of the analogy belies the books widespread appeal. Just as Eisenhower's analysis held forth diametrically opposed promises for the candidates for foxholes vs those for corporate boardrooms, so Spring's insights will be as useful to Rand " think tank" brand policy makers as educational reformers and even revolutionaries.

The book's greatest contribution is to re-open the vistas of education power structure research beyond the scope of Nearing & Counts. [2] The sophistication of the author's methodology approaches that of Domhoff[3] giving rise to a treatment of the public schools which has its counterpart in Ridgeway's[4] treatise on higher education.

However, Spring attempts greater theoretical depth by applying the construct of base and superstructure familiar to the work of many historical materialists. As he traces the development and impact of the corporate-government-foundation network on the ideological development of our educational system, much of his intellectual history and analyses of the class biases of opinion leaders

such as Conant, Bruner, Coleman... is prophetic, if not brilliant. He goes on to an explication of the dynamics of the virtual marketing of science and math cirricula as well as labor power itself, which is so scrupulously documented that his forecastes of its extension to the social sciences and humanitites are nothing short of chilling. His projections concerning the proliferation of the "national service" concept of manpower development are being vividly borne out by recent developments. [5]

The work also moves to shore up some of the weaknesses of the "new historical revisionists." Not only does it move to lessen the tones of conspiracy and teleology, but the greatest improvement is in dealing with their rampant tendencies of white chauvinism. Specifically, Spring's extensive treatment of the Black liberation struggle, including its Pan-Africanist dimensions, as a significant factor in the history of education, constitutes a significant move against the portrayal of Afro-Americans as a passive, silent group playing a non-person role in the face of oppression. However, his silence on the labor education thesis[6] leaves their unilateral approach to class struggle [7] only partially challenged; and finally, his forthright committment to what he terms the "anarchist tradition in education"is also a distinct improvement over the ideological vacillation which particularly characterizes the work of **Bowles & Gintis.** [8]

It is precisely the explicit character of Spring's ideological committment to anarchism as a theoretical model and intellectual history as a methodology which make the weaknesses of the book distinctly traceable to its theoretical underpinnings rather than its refreshingly rigorous scholarship. While Marx viewed "all history as the history of class struggle," as an anarchist Spring perceives the contradictions between the individual and the state as primary and central. Thus less scientific and precise concepts of social stratification such as "sorting" "channeling"...are, for his purposes, as satisfactory as concepts of political economy such as the cyclical nature of capitalism, its organic composition...as long as increasing state intervention can be demonstrated. Similarly, his Education and the Rise of the Corporate State [9] contributed to the historical revisionists' investigation of education vis a vis the developmental stage of state monopoly capitalism as opposed to its declining or "highest point of development" - imperialism - which is covered in The Sorting Machine. The construct of imperialism has taken on considerable scientific meaning as a function of Lenin's work,[10] including features peculiar to the epoch under study; for example, the existence of a socialist bloc, a proliferation of national liberation struggles and an intensification of rank and file trade union activity. However as an anarchist, Spring finds all else secondary to that feature of imperialism symbolized by increasing

power in the hands of the state. Hence, the less scientific term, "foreign policy" is satisfactory for his purposes.

Spring not only finds the establishment of the existence of a "national educational policy" a necessary central thesis of The Sorting Machine but sufficient. It is this theoretical line which leads him to relegate the relationship between education and U.S. foreign policy to the position of a corrollary.

In the area of methodology, Spring does not significantly escape the ravages of subjective idealism so often cited in the criticisms of the work of the "historical revisionists"; for he joins them in a reliance upon intellectual history as his primary mode of historiography. Although the elements of struggle inherent in the anarchist mode partially extricate him from some of the traps of teleological explanation and unilateral approach to class struggle, he joins the historical revisionists in falling into lapses of subjective idealism. Such lapses are partially a function of their rejection of the primacy of material over ideological forces resulting in an unwarranted reliance upon the statements of the opinion leaders of a particular historical period to interpret their own epoch; and a disproportionate emphasis on analyzing the superstructure of society rather than its material base.

Similarly the greater proliferation of printed material by bourgeois forces and their greater access to a class biased media

generates an artifact into intellectual historiography which de-emphasizes the efficacy of minority and working class struggle.

However, the overwhelming volume of research by scholars such as Herbert Aptheker and Philp Foner on the history of Blacks and labor, provides concrete evidence that given sufficient time, effort and perhaps most of all the committment which grows out of a Marxist class consciousness; it can be done! Marx provides the following methodological insights;

> "The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studing such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic--in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production."[11]

As pointed out earlier Spring, is viewing such a "transformation" ie. from the rise of state monopoly capitalism to the stage of imperialism. Even if one disagrees with the Marxist interpretation of the epoch, a self imposed limitation of intellectual historians to the early school committee reports, personal letters and statements of major reformers...does not sufficiently touch upon the "economic foundation" to which Marx refers. Again we may look to

historians such as Aptheker and Foner along with the work of Marxist political economists such as Perlo, Leontyev, Varga... not to mention Marx and Lenin themselves to find extensive use of data as accessible as census reports, Bureau of Labor reports...and labor periodicals, including rank and file "shop papers."

The theoretical and methodological weaknesses particularly come to the fore in Spring's chapter on "The Civil Rights Movement." His reliance upon Eisenhower's statements concerning the public relations dimension of the Civil Rights Movement as it effects U.S.-African relations, as the primary factor explaining government concessions, while confirming his carrollary, causes Spring to overlook far more powerful forces shaping the period. The Leninist conception of "proletarian internationalism" as manifested by the Pan-Africanist dimensions of the Black liberation struggle is ignored. Certainly the connection with education can be made by studying the movement for "community control," the curriculum struggle around the issue of Afro-American studies... Similarly the influence of the Cuban revolution in accelerating the revolutionary zeal of Spanish speaking people within this hemisphere, such as the movement for Puerto Rican independence has manifestations in domestic educational policy struggles. [12] The intensification of the domestic struggle for bilingual education, a critical point in Lenin's [13] formulations on the national question, is a case in point.

Further contradictions in which Spring soon finds himself are indicative of the limitations of the anarchist model. Progressive developments in the Black liberation struggle including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the enforcement of desegregation, affirmative action...clearly demonstrate that, at least for Blacks, centralization of power in the hands of the Federal government is not always malevolent. He acknowledges a similar problem in explaining the apparent contradiction of a "Cold War educational policy" with the "revolutionary" aspects of the "War on Poverty." He resolves the latter by falling back on the "historical revisionists'" unilateral approach to class struggle "discovering" that the War on Poverty was merely a program of "pacification." Thus Spring is objectively put in league with Trotskyite, Maoist and other ultra-left elements who reject the struggle for democratic rights as "hopelessly reformist." [14] While the War on Poverty did not symbolize the consummation of revolutionary struggle, it certainly served as a period of consolidating the gains of the Civil Rights Movement and ushering in a transition to intensified economic struggle. [14a]

In his Chapter on "The National Battle for the Public Schools," Spring establishes the fact that the state made gains in centralizing its control, influence and general hegemony over the public schools. However, his reliance upon intellectual historiography combined with his subordination of the concept of class struggle lead him to

combine data from quarters as far flung as academia and anti-Communist hysterics. Although the two occasionally merged, the academy's attacks on the anti-intellectualism of public school professionals were and remain largely justifiable, while the anti-Communist hysterics were never more than foot soldiers of Joe Mc Carthy's cryto-fascist legions and the sectors of finance capital which they served.

Thus Spring's omission of a more extensive treatment of Mc Cathyism becomes less a function of oversight than a function of anarchism's myopic view of class struggle. Both anti-intellectualism and anti-Communism were battle cries in the class war against an unprecedented rank and file labor movement of the 30's and 40's in which the Communist Party's leadership was prominent and against the isolation of imperialism.

Specifically, the policy of "containment" referenced by Spring, was a eurphemistic response to the post war realization of the permanence of the "Soviet experiment," the successful Communist revolutions in China and Eastern Europe and imminent Communist victories in Latin America. The U.S. intervention in Korea was to be a turning point in opening new theaters for U.S. imperialism in Indo-China. The honeymoon of labor peace was to end, as labor found itself needing to recoup the losses it had taken as a function of its concessions to defeat the Axis fascism. Thus the stage was set for an intensification of class war in the U.S.

Although labor in general and its Communist elements in particular, took heavy losses, the proletariat was able to consolidate many gains ranging from laws concerning minimum wage, maximum hours, workmen's compensation...to the democratic right to organize. The gains in education took the form of opening the gates to minority and working class students through the vehicles of the G.I. Bill and the National Defense Education Loans. The fact that such groups were the nucleus of the demands generating the recent "campus rebellions" and that the Tri-Lateral Commission [14] sees the entrance of such groups into higher education as problematic calls into question the "revisionist" interpretation. Furthermore, if the extension of higher education to increasing numbers of minority and working class students merely aid the capitalist class in extending the imposition of education, and for Spring expanding the hegemony of the state, then it becomes difficult to explain why at a time of "economic crisis and political instability",[15] the first round of cutbacks in higher education are directed at wiping out proletarian gains.

The oversimplification which characterizes the Chapter on- "The Development of a National Curriculum" brings to mind Lenin's[16] struggle with the anarchists over their failure to distinguish between "concentration and centralization" between "the administration of people vs the administration of things."

Spring follows the lead of Ivan Illich,[17] a patriarch of the anarchist tradition in education, who not only fails to deal with the necessity for centralization and planning as dictated by the material base of advanced technology, but proposes to reverse the wheels of technological development in his pursuit of "deschooling." Although the fact that a "national curriculum" under the administration of state monopoly capitalism would favor the interests of finance capital is undeniable, the technological imperatives of our current material base must be dealt with, especially, as they effect the science and math curriculum discussed by Spring. Although Spring is on more solid ground than Illich, he never follows up.

Although Chapter 2 - The Channeling of Manpower...and 6 - Career Education...both deal with what Bowles and Gintis describe as "the reproduction of the capitalist social division of labor," and for Spring validate the increasing role of the state in that reproduction; the factors of political economy which distinguish the two periods must be elaborated.

The period of the 70s described in Chapter 6 has far more in common with the period of the 30s. As an anarchist, Spring's neglect of political economy results in an insufficient effort to compare and contrast the two periods. Both were periods of severe economic depression for U.S. capitalism and in both instances the concept of

"national service" was proposed as a means for resolving this classic capitalist contradiction. However, while the spectre of fascism cited by Spring was raised by other progressives during both periods, the nuclear stalemate and the isolation of U.S. imperialism eliminate World War as a way out. Communists and other progressives of the 30s realized the necessity to offer in depth analyses of fascism such as those of Dmitroff, Togliatti et. al.; [18] for youth could not be blithely requested to forsake the benefits offered by the Civilian Conservation Corps...any more than the legions of chronically unemployed youth in today's ghettos [19] and barrios can be expected to resist the temptations of "national service" coming from quarters as varied as James Coleman and Harrington's Youth Employment Bill; despite historic parallels with Hitler and Mussolini's "Youth Corps." The situation is complicated by the fact that such a "national service" concept could be used against the unprecedented rank and file labor activity which characterized both periods. Revolutionary cadre will require far more than the simple anarchist exhortations of Bakunin, Illich, Spring et. al. to lead us through this period.

At any rate, regardless of where you stand on the anarchist-[20] Marxist debate, or even if you assume the extreme position of Daniel Bell's[21] ideology of non-ideology, the informed reader cannot afford to miss The Sorting Machine. As for me - I anxiously await Spring's inevitable Volume Three of Education and the Corporate State.

1. Bowles, Samuel and Gintis, Herbert - Schooling in Capitalist America, Basic Books, New York, 1976, pp: 230-231

   Bowles and Gintis include the following scholars under the banner of "historical revisionists"; Michael Katz, Clarence Karier, Marvin Lazarson, Carl Kaestle, Joel Spring, David Tyack, Colin Greer. They summarize their analysis as follows: "...in their view, schools were promoted first and foremost as agents for the social control of an increasingly culturally heterogeneous and poverty stricken urban population in an increasingly unstable and threatening economic and political system."

2. Nearing, Scott - "Who's Who on Our Boards of Education?" School and Society, January 20, 1917, Vol. 5, #108, pp. 89-90.

   Nearing, Scott - "Who's Who Among College Trustees?" School and Society, September 8, 1917, Vol. 6, #141, pp: 297-299.

   Counts, George S. - "The Social Composition of Boards of Education: A study in the Social Control of Public Education" Chicago, 1927, pp: 87.

3. For a general description of the nationwide corporate-government-foundation network, see Domhoff, G. William - Who Rules America? Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967. A specific manual on methodology is provided by Domhoff in his "Researching the Governing Class of America" a pamphlet published by New England Free Press, Boston, 1969.

4. Ridgeway, James - The Closed Corporation: American Universities in Crisis Ballantine Books, New York, 1968.

5. Coleman, James - Youth: Transition to Adulthood-A Report of the Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee, University of Chicago Press, 1974.

6. The "labor education" thesis takes the position that the voluntary associations of the proletariat played an active role in the struggle for free, compulsory, public education. For a summary of research, see Pawa, Jay - "Workingmen and Free Schools in the 19th Century: A comment on the Labor Education Thesis." History of Education Quarterly, Vol. 2, #3, Fall 1971, pp: 287-302.

7. Marx's declaration in The Communist Manifesto, that, "All history is the history of class struggle," clearly viewed the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as bilateral with both parties constantly active and dynamic in accordance with the dialectical laws of internal contradiction and the unity of opposites. On the other hand, the historical revisionists clearly take a unilateral approach to class struggle by objectively denying the labor education thesis and the struggles by minorities, either by ommission or explicit statements.

8. Op.Cit., Bowles and Gintis

9. Spring treats the ramifications of the consolidation of state monopoly capitalism on education in the U.S., in his Education and the Rise of the Corporate State Beacon Press, Boston, 1972.

10. Lenin, V.I. - Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism, in the Selected Works (one volume) International Publishers, New York, 1974.

11. Marx, Karl - A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, International Publishers, New York, 1970, pp: 21.

12. A voluminous documentation of the struggle for bilingual education is provided in a press kit issued by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund Inc., New York, 1974.

13. Lenin treats the question of bilinqual education in Lenin, V.I. - National Liberation, Socialism and Imperialism, International Publishers, New York, 1976.

14. See Perlo, Victor - Economics of Racism, International Publishers, New York, 1975, in which this transition is the major thesis.

    Lenin, V.I. - Left Wing Communism; An Infantile Disorder, International Publishers, New York, 1938.

15. The Tri-Lateral Commission is a brain child of David Rockefeller which is composed of the top capitalist leaders of the U.S., Europe, and Japan. The fact that President Carter, Vice President Mondale and a significant number of cabinet appointments were drawn from the ranks of the Commission make it difficult to ignore. See Crozier, Michael - Crisis of Democracy: A Report on the Tri-Lateral Commission, New York University Press, New York, 1975. See also revisionist thesis defined in footnote 1.

16. Lenin, V.I. - State and Revolution in Selected Works (one volume) International Publishers, 1974, pp: 323-351.
Marx, Engels and Lenin - Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndacalism - Selected Writings, International Publishers, New York 1975.

17. Illich, Ivan - Deschooling Society, Harper and Row, New York, 1971.

18. Dimitroff and Togiatti both provide analyses which grow out of their first hand experiences in the struggle against Hitler and Mussolini, respectively.
See, Dimitroff, Georgi - The United Front Against Fascism, International Publishers, New York, 1938, and Togliatti, Palmiro - Lectures on Fascism, International Publishers, New York, 1976.

19. See the recent special issue of Freedomways, Volume 15, Number 3, 1975 which is entitled "Afro-American Youth - The Road Ahead."

20. For a fuller explication of Spring's theoretical committment to anarchism, see Spring's "Anarchism and Education; A Dissenting Tradition" in Karier, Clarence J, Violas, Paul and Spring, Joel - Roots of Crisis, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1973; along with his later anarchist's educational manifesto - Spring, Joel - A Primer of Libertarian Education, Free Life Editions, New York, 1975.

21. Bell, Daniel - The End of Ideology; The Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the 50s, Free Press, New York,1965.

Notes

Spring, Joel - The Sorting Machine, McKay, New York, 1976.